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Bill Bell - the Grand Old Man of Buderim Sport

by Bill Lavarack

This is the second chapter in the story of the Caton-Townsend-Bell-Chadwick family line. It covers the life of William Fawcett Bell junior 28/8/1872 - 21/12/1963.

Bill Bell was born in Durham County, England in 1872, the fourth of eight children¹ of William Fawcett Bell senior and Mary Ann Willcock.² The family migrated to Australia (and to Buderim) in 1884 on the S.S. *Dorunda*, sponsored by James Lindsay of Buderim who was a relative of Mary Willcock.

The Bell block on what is now Crosby Hill Road, had poor soil which was not well suited for farming and the Bell children had to make their own way in life. Bill was, at various times a farmer, timber cutter and a transport driver. He apparently made a success of his life, as in the 1920s he owned two farms, one on Burnett Street which he named 'Rocklea' and one on King Street near Wirreanda, named 'Hylton.'

Bill married Alice Minnie Townsend (20/5/1877 - 8 /7/1900).

William (Bill) Bell and his daughter Ivy 1912.
Photo: BHS



¹ Lavarack, Bev and Bill, 2023, *The Bells of Buderim*, Occasional Paper no. 18.

² The eighth child, Louisa, died in Australia as a baby.

Tragically Minnie died in Brisbane of septicaemia soon after the birth of their daughter Ivy (8/7/1900 - 2/10/1988). Bill brought his newborn daughter by train to Palmwoods, then in his arms on horseback to Buderim. She was then taken in and raised by her grandmother Harriet Townsend and the Townsend family. Bill Bell remained a constant part of her life. He never re-married.



Bill Bell in one of his many jobs, delivering bananas to the rail in Landsborough in 1900.

Photo: BHS

He is best remembered for his sporting achievements. In the booklet commemorating Buderim's 100th birthday, William Fawcett Bell junior was described as the 'grand old man of Buderim sport'¹. He is credited with reviving tennis on Buderim in the early 1900s and was

wicket keeper for Buderim cricket teams up to the First World War. In the 1930s he was on various committees including the Buderim Golf Club.

The Buderim Mountaineers Tennis Club 1908. Back row: Emma Burnett, Stan Townsend, Agnes Wordie, Len Fielding, May Lindsay, Jim Guy. Middle: Elsie Atkinson, Ivy Bell, Clarice Bates, Flossie Sawrey, Lizzie Jones, Miss Neil. Front: Syd Bates, Bill Bell, Arch Lindsay, Harold Guy. *Photo: BHS*



Bill's grandson, Ken Chadwick, describes him as a 'quiet, shy man who did not like public speaking and consequently held back

from important administrative positions, although his advice on committees of various sports and community groups was invaluable over the years'². Ken Chadwick tells how Bill Bell was possibly the first, maybe the only, labourer to go on strike to get Saturday afternoons off to play sport. He was working for Wallace Burnett and the working week then consisted of six days work, then rest on the Sabbath. Playing sport was out of the question on Sundays. The strike was successful.



Bill Bell's house on Burnett St. opposite Townsend Rd. About 1915. *Photo: BHS.*

¹Anon, 1962, *Buderim 100 Years of achievement Reviewed*, 24 page souvenir booklet.

² Chadwick, K.B., 2017, *From Buderim Farmer to Band Leader*, publ. and edited by Bill Lavarack, 69 pages.

During World War 1 he volunteered for active service, but was rejected.¹ He was 42 years old.

He had a leading role in the formation of the Mooloolaba Surf Life Saving Club in 1923. 'Mooloolah Heads,' which eventually changed its name to 'Mooloolaba', became a popular camping and holiday place for Buderim residents at Easter and Christmas in the 1890s and early 1900s. This led to the formation of the Mooloolah River Sports Club in 1919. Bill Bell was the first president. Club members were largely from Buderim with a few from Tanawah, Forest Glen, Palmwoods and Eudlo. The club organised competitions including an annual aquatic carnival, including swimming and rowing races.

Following the example of Maroochydore, the Sports Club became a Surf Life Saving Club in 1923 with the aim of making the beach safer and thereby attracting visitors and contributing to the development to the area. In the early days the competitive sporting element of the various clubs was in its infancy, but starting to develop, along with the primary purpose of saving lives. In 1923 a large crowd of Buderim residents journeyed to Mooloolaba to see life saving demonstrations by Mooloolaba and Maroochydore clubs to mark the opening of a new shed to house the reel. Two members of the local club, Bill Bell and Percy Jakeman were successful in the test for the 600 yards swim fully clothed.

Amazingly Bill Bell was 51 years old when he obtained his Royal Life Saving Society qualifications in 1923. One of the tests was to swim fully clothed in freshwater with a brick on the chest. He obtained not only the usual Bronze Medallion, but was awarded the Award of Merit, a higher order.

Bill Bell at the lagoon on Meridan Plains.
Photo: Ken Chadwick



To get the required level of fitness he would ride his horse to Meridan Plains after work and train by himself in the freshwater lagoons. He maintained this fitness for many years, acting as beltman for the lifesaving team, a position that requires a very fit man. He was captain of the surf boat crew when the club's first boat the *Spray* was launched and later he was Club Instructor.



Mooloolaba Life Saving Club's Duncalfe Shield winning team of January 1924 R to L: Percy Jakeman (Instructor and Captain), Geoff Wills, William Bell, James Howe and John Pringle.

Photo: Ken Chadwick collection.

As a Foundation Member of the Club and being, at that time over 50 years of age, he was looked on as one of the father figures and affectionately called 'Uncle Bill'. He gave stability, purpose and direction in those early years. His

overall services were recognised with Life Membership in 1925 and Life Governorship in 1929.

¹ Helene Cronin, 2015, *Buderim's Great War Effort 1914- 1918 . . . and its Living War Memorial*, publ. by Helene Cronin, 355 pages.

He became a judge with the North Coast Branch and officiated at carnivals up to 1940 when the Second World War temporarily closed the beaches to life saving,

In his later years Bill Bell was a noted gardener and his garden was a feature of Buderim. He died at Buderim on 21 December 1963 and was buried in the Buderim Lawn Cemetery



Buderim lifesavers off to Mooloolaba. On this occasion in the baker's van. Bill Bell is in the blazer, Arthur Parkyn next to him. Note the immaculate dress – very different to today. Also note the Methodist Church in the background. Photo: BHS



[Apologies for this well known image. I couldn't resist including it yet again.]

Mooloolaba SLSC first R & R team 1923. Beltman: Bill Bell, Vince Crosby and George Newberry carrying the reel, also in the squad are Frank Newberry, Tom Irwin and Percy Jakeman. (Photo: Ken Chadwick collection)

Acknowledgements

Several photographs (labelled 'BHS') are from the Buderim Historical Sociey Inc. collection.

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References

Chadwick, K.B., 2017, *From Buderim Farmer to Band Leader*, publ. and edited by Bill Lavarack, 69 pages.

Longhurst, Robert, 1997, *Mooloolaba Surf Lifesaving Club. Our Club History 1922 – 1997*. Mooloolaba Surf Lifesaving Club.



Bill Bell in retirement in his Buderim Garden